

Buddhism and Health-Care of Humans

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Medical science of India is generally referred to as Āyurveda. This means knowledge or science pertaining to life [we believe primarily of the humans]. Therefore it necessarily concerns itself with safeguarding life against possible untimely danger to it through destruction brought about by disease [*roga-niḍḍam* - i.e. the human body being referred to as an ideal nesting place for diseases]. Thus medical science covers two broad areas of prevention and cure.

The human body is also, by its very basic fragile nature [*pabhaṅguram*], liable to be damaged and destroyed prematurely through violence of both man and nature. Accidents caused by the reckless behavior of man, such as on the highways [on land, sea and air], and in work-places, belong to the former. Volcanic disturbances, earth quakes, tidal waves and cyclones come within the latter.

Any harm to life, of both man and animal, and coming under any of both categories mentioned above, needs to be brought, wherever possible, under the benevolent care of man.

As far as Buddhists are concerned, this is where the virtue of *karuṇā*, reckoned as the second of the *Brahmavihāras*, primarily comes into play. Buddhists are called upon to exercise their quality of love in the direction of compassion [*karuṇā*] when and wherever people are discovered to be in distress and discomfort [*para-dukkhe hadaya-kampanam*]. We cannot forget the glittering example set by the Buddha himself, personally attending on the sick monk Pūtigatta, with the words `He who attends on the sick, attends on me': *Yo gilānaṃ upaṭṭhahati so maṃ upaṭṭhahati*.

Buddhists are aware of both these areas where humans need to show

concern for the care of fellow humans. 1. Primarily to safeguard their health through prevention and cure against diseases, and 2. to safeguard against accidental risks to their lives in the hands of man or nature.

We rest assured that humans in any part of the world, with any degree of sanity in their heads and humaneness in their hearts, ungrudgingly fulfill these social obligations. We have personally witnessed this in the United States when the Space- ship 13 failed to make its journey to the moon and had to be called back. As far as Buddhists are concerned, their magnanimity has to rise so well above board as not to be linked with any petty group considerations. It must record an unequivocal universality. Their only loyalty has to be that of the humans for the humans, as a totality. Their humanitarian love cannot be tied up with any man-made small pockets, with dominating human arrogance by way of party or group interests.

In Sri Lanka today, the devastation caused by the Tsunami disaster calls for immediate mobilization of relief aid from any and every quarter, wherever possible. The extent of damage caused both to life and property is inestimably vast. They certainly need repair and replacement. But our main area of interest at the moment shall be the repair and redress to the damage caused to human life. We shall be mainly interested in providing health care for the speedy recovery of all persons who have suffered physical and mental injury and damage during this recent disaster.

In the light of what we have discussed so far, time is very opportune for Sri Lanka to set up without further delay a non-governmental permanent bureau to undertake in toto the human health care services in situations as envisaged above. As far as the post-tsunami situation is concerned, it would naturally be viewed as pro-tem. But with the experience it acquires during this period and the resources it gathers around itself, this would very naturally evolve itself into a powerful limb of national development, with an island-wide spirit of homogeneous nationhood.

It is both our hope and prayer that such an organization would ensure that everybody would be genuinely concerned with the security and welfare of everybody in the land, with no garbage dumps here and there where divisive elements would sprout, any time for any reason. We contemplate **SU-RAK-ŞĀ** as a possible appropriate name for it. Let us have a banner of four glittering stars in a brilliant blue sky.

With this end in view, we shall list below specific areas and items for which we need to find the means and provide them.

In very broad terms they are:

1. financial assistance
2. material needs
3. man power resources

There is no gainsaying that under financial assistance, relief operations will naturally have to proceed on a blank cheque. Funds have to be raised and money collected from all possible quarters. Availability of money, more often than not, cannot be allowed to determine priorities. The need being real, money has to be found. It is no secret that financial aid is freely flowing in.

1. Financial assistance

This is where top security has to be maintained with regard to the allocation and appropriation of funds. A supreme command, a board comprising of both civil and military personnel, should take complete charge of the bank into which all monies should flow in without exception. Receipts and payments shall always be known to them.

The allocation authority shall be a sub-division under that board, working under the approval of and answerable to it. They shall itemize the recipients, justifying the claims and priorities.

2. Material needs

For efficient and expeditious service under an organization like this,

- A. Grade one transport is a must. For a start, we would feel the immediate need of at least the following three categories of vehicles, numbers being carefully decided according to need.
 - i. Fully equipped ambulances, with some wheel chairs
 - ii. Passenger transport vehicles
 - iii. Cargo-carrier lorries or trucks

- B. All other items like household goods, furniture, kitchen utensils, clothing etc. should be collected in terms of situational needs. A strict sense of economy should be exercised in the supply of these, applying a sense of basic utility.